THE TRUE POSSESSION

BY

ISABEL FOSTER

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ISABEL FOSTER

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To the "little ones,"
a Christmas gift for all the year.

PREFACE

In sending out this story, I have realized that we can only give that which is our own.

We can theorize and perhaps deliver good advice, but unless we have proven and applied our theories we do not make the experience our own, and have, therefore, no just right to expect what we say to reach or help anyone, because no one is willing to receive something from some one to whom that something does not belong.

This is even more true about thoughts than about material things.

It often seems strange to us that children do not more readily respond to that which we have given time and labor to explain, but do we pause to consider whether we are attempting to give something we do not possess? Whether it be love, unselfishness or anything else.

It is not what we teach, however able it may be, it is what we are, that reaches them, and we need never look for their response to anything less.

To those, who put this story in the hands of children, I can say it is a gift for each "little one," for they can make the truth in it their own, as the one who gives it to them has proven it more than once.

Therefore, I send this forth, simple as the story may appear, with a confidence I could not feel in one which lacked the power of Truth.

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"Oh, what beautiful roses!" exclaimed Eleanor. "How lovely the six would look in the vase on my desk. There, when I divide them they don't fill it right; but it would look mean if I didn't share them with Dorothy. I wonder if two would be enough to give her? She couldn't expect many when they are a present to me. Four certainly look better than three in the vase, and I really think two look just as graceful together as three. Besides, some sisters wouldn't give her any, or only one."

By this time Eleanor had persuaded herself that two of her roses would be a generous gift.

After thus bestowing them, she filled, with water, the vase which was to hold her own four, when some playmates called for her to hurry, as she was late starting on a chestnutting expedition, and the wagon couldn't wait. This put Eleanor in a great flurry with hunting her hat, and for-

getting her gloves, while little Dorothy was kept busy running about in search of a handkerchief Eleanor had dropped somewhere on the stairs.

Late that afternoon, as the children were on their homeward way, a trifling accident occurred to the wagon, which decided them to walk home, as they had already reached the city.

While passing some houses they noticed a pale, tired looking child seated on a doorstep, holding a beautiful rose.

Eleanor paused and looked so steadfastly at the little girl, that she held the rose behind her, gazing with wide, frightened eyes at her tormentor.

"Where did you get such a glorious rose?" demanded Eleanor.

"It's mine," whimpered the child, "she gave it to me."

"Some lady?"

"No, the little girl."

"Nonsense, little girls don't have roses like that to give away; they cost a lot of money."

"It's mine," repeated the child, her little hand growing hot as she clasped her treasure in it.

At this moment the door opened and a woman came out.

"Mama," cried the child in a relieved tone, "my flower," and she stretched out her arm toward her.

"Do you want me to put it in water?"

"Yes, it's mine, it's mine."

"To be sure, but not two minutes ago you wouldn't hear to having it out of your sight," then turning to the children, who still lingered, she said, "my Lizzie has never been away from the city, and the only flowers she ever saw grow are dandelions, and the only flowers she ever handled are daisies the neighbors brought her. She isn't strong to walk and I never get a minute from work to spare for her, but to-day is her birthday and she was sitting here crying, when along came a sweet little girl, with a beautiful rose in her hand. Lizzie looked at it real hard and then I heard her ask to smell it. I put my head out of the window, though the soapsuds were over my hands, and I saw a real pretty little girl, dressed real pretty, too, and she let Lizzie smell the rose.

"Then I heard Lizzie say how it was her birthday and we were too poor for her to have a present, and she asked the little girl if she would

let her hold the flower in her very own hands, and smell it just a little while, for a birthday present. The little girl put it in Lizzie's hand, saying she was carrying it to a lady who used to have lots of flowers in the country, and missed them living in the city, but she said it seemed this rose must be intended for Lizzie's birthday.

"I leaned out and told the little girl how Lizzie had never held a rose in her hand before, and the little girl's eyes looked like stars, and she said she knew she'd been sent with the rose for Lizzie, and she would come sometimes to see her, and bring her a flower growing in a pot."

From the group of children a curly headed boy came forward.

"I've got flowers in my garden, and to-morrow I can bring Lizzie some."

"Bertha," whispered a larger boy, "don't you think mother would let us take her to the country with us on the farm?"

"We'll ask her," responded his sister warmly.

As the children continued on their way, they talked over many plans in which the thought was a loving, unselfish wish to bring more happiness

into the daily existence of the child who had found joy in the touch and fragrance of a rose.

When Eleanor reached home she felt tired and cross.

Dorothy was standing expectantly at the window, and ran to open the door for her.

"Did you have lots of fun? Did you get lots of chestnuts?"

"Yes, we got loads, but they're all in the wagon. Something got the matter with it, and we walked home, and had to stop an age to hear a tiresome woman talk about her child, and some silly girl who had given her a magnificent rose. For my part, I don't think she had any business giving a hot-house flower to a dirty little thing who couldn't know how to appreciate—"

"Oh, but, Eleanor, she never held a rose in her hand in all her life."

"Dorothy Mattox, you don't mean to tell me you went and gave away one of my roses—"

"No, no, of course not, Eleanor, it was one you gave me."

"Well, it's all the same thing. I might as well have kept them myself, and I would have, if I hadn't supposed you wanted some. You always pretend to be crazy over roses."

"I do love them, Eleanor, I love them so I can't bear to keep them for just me. They always seem to say, 'Look at me, I am telling you of love, let me tell my message everywhere, don't let me waste it here shut up in a room,' and you know, Eleanor, what blesses one blesses all, so I left one at home and started with the other for Mrs. Farnum, but surely Lizzie needed the blessing most, so I left it with her."

"Yes, I saw it, getting all withered in her hot hands."

"But, Eleanor, it made her rejoice, and gladness is her heritage. Why, when I came home and looked at my rose that was left, it didn't seem near as beautiful as thinking of the one Lizzie held squeezed in her hand, and that made me think of the verse in the hymn:

" 'For we must share, if we would keep
That blessing from above:
Ceasing to give, we cease to have,
Such is the law of love.'

"I couldn't get it out of my head, because it was just as plain as plain, that of the two roses, the one I gave away was the one I really had, because it was the one I kept seeing in Lizzie's hand, and the one I liked to see, so I decided to

keep the other the same way, and I knew you'd let me look at your roses, so I put on my things again and took it to Mrs. Farnum."

"Well, I declare! And when we go to the party to-morrow, I suppose you think I'll give you some of mine, and I don't think that's fair, when I gave you two already. I couldn't spare any more, and besides, I was afraid they might not all keep fresh, and if I kept enough I'd be sure of one or two. I forget whether I put them in my room, or left them in the bathroom, the girls hurried me so I didn't know what I was doing. I don't remember a thing about them after I filled the vase with water."

Somewhat disturbed she ran up to her room, followed by Dorothy, and there on her desk, in front of the open register, lay the four roses, withered and faded. When Eleanor lifted them in her hand, they drooped strengthless on the stems.

Eleanor's lip quivered and the tears gathered drop by drop.

Loving little Dorothy's arms were around her in a moment.

"Eleanor, sister dear, oh, I'm sorry. If I hadn't given away your other two roses you could have them."

"No, it's all my fault," sobbed Eleanor. "I got in such a hurry I forgot to put them in water. Hark! someone is calling you."

With a parting hug Dorothy left her sister, but soon reappeared with a beautiful rose in her hand.

"Only look, Eleanor, here is one of your very own roses to wear to the party."

"How can that be possible?"

"Isn't it wonderful? Mrs. Farnum is downstairs with mother, and to-morrow she goes back to the country, and she came to say good-bye, and she said she had enjoyed the rose all day, and it rested her when she looked at it, and thought of the love that came to her with it, but she didn't want it fading in the hot cars, so she brought it over for me."

"Put it in water, Dorothy, and you shall wear it to-morrow, because it is your's. Remember that verse: 'Ceasing to give, we cease to have,'—you didn't cease giving, dear little, unselfish Dorothy, and so you have a rose, while I measured and counted mine, and, yes, I grudged giving you two, and so by hoarding mine I have none."

"No, no, Eleanor, you only lost those you 'ceased to give,' for see, here is one you gave, and it will be sweet on your gown to-morrow."

"Well, dear little sister, put it in water, and in the morning we'll go together and take it to Lizzie, with some other things that she'll like, and that will be the best way for us to share the rose between us, and the best way to keep it, too."

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